

A Guide to  
Making an  
Examination  
Of  
Conscience  
and a Good  
Confession



## Preparing for Confession

- Find a quiet place to pray and think.
- Ask the Holy Spirit in prayer to help you remember your sins.
- Use the questions below as a guide.
- Remember to include sins of omission– that is, things you *should have* done but did not.

## Mortal Sins Must Be Confessed

*You are only obligated to confess mortal sins, although confession of venial sins is very helpful in receiving the grace to avoid sin in the future and for advancing in holiness.*

For a sin to be *mortal*, three conditions must be met (in bold): “Mortal sin is sin whose **object is grave matter** and which is also **committed with full knowledge** and **deliberate consent**.” (CCC 1857; emphasis added)

“*Grave matter* is specified by the Ten Commandments, corresponding to the answer of Jesus to the rich young man: ‘Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not defraud, honor your father and your mother.’ The gravity of sins is more or less great: murder is graver than theft. One must also take into account who is wronged: violence against parents is in itself graver than violence against a stranger.” (CCC 1858)

## Examination of Conscience

*First, consider how well you have kept the Ten Commandments.*

### First Commandment

I am the LORD your God. You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve.

Have you?

- Do I put other things, activities or people before God?
- Have I spent time with God each day in prayer?
- Do I accept all of God's teaching or just the parts I find convenient?
- Have I practiced or engaged in occult practices, such as consulting horoscopes, tarot cards, fortune telling, or “Ouija” boards?
- Have I denied my faith in any ways?
- Have I ever received Holy Communion in the state of mortal sin?

### Second Commandment

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

Have you?

- Do I always show respect and reverence for God's name?
- Have I used God's name as a curse, out of anger or in a careless way?
- Have I irreverently spoken about God or about any sacred person, place, or thing?
- Have I done my best to fulfill any promises in which I invoked God's name (oaths)?

### **Third Commandment**

Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day.

Have you?

- Have I deliberately missed Mass on a Sunday or holy day of obligation without just cause (for example, a serious illness)?
- Do I actively and fully participate at Mass?
- Have I carelessly arrived late or left early from Mass without a serious reason?
- Have I kept the Eucharistic fast before Mass (ie: no food or drink-except water-for one hour before receiving Holy Communion)?

### **Fourth Commandment**

Honor your father and your mother.

Have I...

- Have I failed to show love and respect to my parents?
- Have I lied to, deceived, or disobeyed them?
- Have I gotten angry, talked back, or used profanity at them?
- Have I failed to be grateful for the sacrifices they have made for my family?
- Have I fulfilled all the duties and responsibilities I have toward my parents and family?
- Have I been critical of them to others?
- Do I respect and obey others who have a legitimate role of authority in my life?

### **Fifth Commandment**

You shall not kill.

- Have I killed or harmed someone physically, mentally, or verbally?
- Am I harming myself (and setting a bad example for others) by taking drugs or abusing alcohol?
- Have I harmed someone through insults or bullying?
- Have I mutilated or harmed my body?
- Have I tried to commit suicide?
- Did I have an abortion?
- Have I encouraged, helped, or in any way participated in someone else's abortion?
- Have I easily lost my temper or shown anger toward someone?
- Have I fostered a grudge or failed to forgive another?

### **Sixth & Ninth Commandments**

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.

Have I...

- Do I treat the body as a temple of the Holy Spirit, respecting the sexual dignity of others and myself?
- Have I willfully engaged in impure thoughts or desires?
- Have I looked at pornographic images or videos?
- Have I watched impure TV shows or movies?
- Have I committed impure acts by myself (ie: committed the sin of masturbation)
- Have I committed impure acts with another or led others to commit impure acts?
- Have I dressed or acted immodestly, possibly leading others to sin?
- Have I practiced any form of contraception?

## Seventh & Tenth Commandments

You shall not steal.

You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.

Have I...

- Have I stolen anything or helped or encouraged anyone else to steal?
- If I have stolen something, have I made restitution to its owner?
- Have I damaged another's property without acknowledging and making restitution?
- Have I been greedy or overly attached to the things of the world?
- Have I carelessly wasted time at home, at school, or at work?
- Have I failed to help others— especially the poor— by neglecting to share what I have?
- Have I honored my debts?

## Eighth Commandment

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Have I...

- Have I lied?
- Have I revealed the faults of others without just cause?
- Have I gossiped about others?
- Have I failed to honor a confidence or secret entrusted to me?
- Have I damaged another's reputation through lies or accusations?
- Have I failed to defend someone's good name?

## The Seven Deadly Sins and the Opposite Virtues

*Am I guilty of any of the following sins? Consider how you can grow in the opposing virtue.  
(See CCC 1866.)*

<b>Sin</b>	<b>Virtue</b>	<b>Sin</b>	<b>Virtue</b>
1. Pride	Humility	5. Gluttony	Temperance
2. Greed	Generosity	6. Envy	Kindness
3. Lust	Chastity	7. Sloth	Diligence (Persistence)
4. Anger	Patience (Meekness)		

## The Spiritual Works of Mercy

*By considering the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy we can remember times we may have committed sins of omission. We can also be reminded of ways in which we can grow in holiness. Have I neglected to do the following when circumstances obliged me?*

1. Counsel the doubtful
2. Instruct the ignorant.
3. Admonish sinners.
4. Comfort the sorrowful.
5. Bear wrongs patiently.
6. Forgive all injuries.
7. Pray for the living and the dead.

## Confession: A “How To” Guide

Forgotten how to go to confession, or never learned? Here are the “How to’s” for the Sacrament of Penance (i.e., confession).

**Penitent:** the person confessing his sins.

**Confessor:** the Priest administering the Sacrament.

1. The Penitent enters the confessional and kneels down at the screen.
2. The Penitent, making the sign of the cross, says, **Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It has been \_\_\_\_\_ (state amount of time) since my last confession. These are my sins.**
3. The Penitent confesses his sins. The Confessor listens, but he may ask questions if something the Penitent has said is unclear or in order to lead the Penitent to a more thorough examination of conscience. (NB. All mortal sins – each kind and the number of times committed – **must** be confessed. All venial sins **should** be confessed.)
4. When the Penitent finishes confessing, he signifies this by saying: **For these and all my sins, I ask forgiveness of God and absolution from you, Father.** The Confessor may offer some advice or counsel, so that the Penitent may take the necessary steps to amend his life.
5. The Confessor then gives a penance (usually a prayer or a good work) and then instructs the Penitent to make an Act of Contrition. There are different formulas. An act of Contrition is usually printed in the confessional.
6. After the Penitent has made an Act of Contrition, the Confessor imparts absolution with the sacramental formula. The Penitent makes the Sign of the Cross at the absolution.
7. The Confessor concludes with these or similar words: **Your sins are forgiven. Go in peace.** The Penitent responds, saying: **Thanks be to God.**
8. The Penitent leaves the confessional and fulfills the penance as soon as possible.

### The Act of Contrition

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee. And I detest all my sins because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell but, most of all, because they offend Thee, my God Who are all good and deserving of all my love. And I firmly resolve with the help of Thy grace to confess my sins, to do penance and to amend my life. Amen.

Or

My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against you whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend, with your help, to do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin. Our Savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for us. In his name, my God, have mercy.

## **The Bible on Confession**

- "I give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19).
- "Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 18:18).
- "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (John 20:22-23).
- "Go, show yourself to the Priest" (Luke 5:14; 17:14; Matthew 8:4).
- "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15).
- "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36).

## **The Catechism of the Catholic Church on Confession:**

- "You shall confess your sins (to a Priest) at least once a year" (2042).
- "Christ instituted the sacrament of Penance [confession] for all sinful members of His Church: above all for those who, since Baptism, have fallen into grave sin, and have thus lost their baptismal grace and wounded ecclesial communion. It is to them that the sacrament of Penance offers a new possibility to convert and to recover the grace of justification. The Fathers of the Church present this sacrament as 'the second plank [of salvation] after the shipwreck which is the loss of grace'" (1446).
- "All mortal sins of which penitents after a diligent self-examination are conscious must be recounted by them in confession, even if they are most secret and have been committed against the last two precepts of the Decalogue; for these sins sometimes wound the soul more grievously and are more dangerous than those which are committed openly" (1456; Council of Trent, DS 1680).

## **The Saints on Confession:**

- "Confession is an act of honesty and courage - an act of entrusting ourselves, beyond sin, to the mercy of a loving and forgiving God" (Pope St. John Paul II).
- "The confession of evil works is the first beginning of good works" (St. Augustine).
- "Go to your confessor; open your heart to him; display to him all the recesses of your soul; take the advice that he will give you with the utmost humility and simplicity. For God, Who has an infinite love for obedience, frequently renders profitable the counsels we take from others, but especially from those who are the guides of our souls" (St. Francis de Sales).
- "In failing to confess, Lord, I would only hide You from myself, not myself from You" (St. Augustine).
- "Confession is like a bridle that keeps the soul which reflects on it from committing sin, but anything left unconfessed we continue to do without fear as if in the dark" (St. John Climacus).
- "A soul does not benefit from the sacrament of confession if it is not humble. Pride keeps it in darkness. The soul neither knows how, nor is it willing, to probe with precision the depths of its own misery. It puts on a mask and avoids everything that might bring it recovery" (St. Faustina).
- "At the time of your examination (of sins) beware of the devil that ties your tongue" (St. Josemaria Escriva).

- "The devil does not bring sinners to hell with their eyes open: he first blinds them with the malice of their own sins. Before we fall into sin, the enemy labors to blind us, that we may not see the evil we do and the ruin we bring upon ourselves by offending God. After we commit sin, he seeks to make us dumb [i.e., silent], that, through shame, we may conceal our guilt in confession" (St. Alphonsus Liguori).
- "The want of proper examination, true contrition, and a firm purpose of amendment, is the cause of bad confessions, and of the ruin of souls" (St. Benedict Joseph Labre).
- "Obedience to a confessor is the most acceptable offering which we can make to God, and the most secure way of doing the divine will" (St. Alphonsus Liguori).

## **POPE FRANCIS ON CONFESSION**

"Someone can say, 'I confess my sins only to God.' Yes, you can say to God, 'forgive me,' and say your sins. But our sins are also against our brothers, against the Church. This is why it is necessary to ask forgiveness of the Church and of our brothers, in the person of the Priest . . . Forgiveness is not something we can give ourselves."

"[Someone may say:] Father, I am embarrassed! Even embarrassment is good. It's healthy to have a bit of shame... it does us good, because it makes us more humble. Don't be afraid of confession . . . When someone is in line for confession he feels all these things - even shame - but then, when he finishes confessing, he leaves (feeling) free, great, beautiful, forgiven, clean, happy. The sacrament of reconciliation is a sacrament of healing."

"Be courageous, and go to confession."

